

**Marine Mammal Protection Act Incidental Harassment Authorization Report**

**Glaucous-winged Gull & Climate Monitoring in Glacier Bay National Park, Alaska**

**January 1 – December 31, 2024**

Submitted by:

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Submitted to:

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## **Background**

The National Marine Fisheries Service issued Glacier Bay National Park a Letter of Authorization (LOA) permit to effectively access island study sites for gull and climate monitoring in Glacier Bay National Park (GLBA), in southeastern Alaska from 2019 - 2024. The gull monitoring studies are mandated by a Record of Decision of an Legislative Environmental Impact Statement (NPS 2010) which states that Glacier Bay National Park must initiate a monitoring program for glaucous-winged gulls (*Larus glaucescens*) to inform future native egg harvest by the Hoonah Tlingit in Glacier Bay, Alaska. To effectively access the islands for gull monitoring, occasional minimal disturbance (or Level B harassment) of harbor seals may occur. Additionally, the National Park Service Inventory and Monitoring Program maintains a weather/climate station on Lone Island where harbor seals haul out seasonally. Our Letter of Authorization permit allows us to access five study sites up to five times per year each for gull and climate research and monitoring activities. We expected that the disturbance to harbor seals would be minimal and limited to Level B harassment and would not result in serious injury or death.

## **Pre-survey monitoring**

Three study sites were accessed a total of five times over the summer including four visits for gull surveys and one visit for climate monitoring weather station maintenance. Harbor seals were observed hauled out on two of these occasions (Table 1). Each site was monitored for harbor seals at a distance of >500 m before approach. Steller sea lions were observed on a single survey of South Marble Island and a distance of 100 yards was maintained at all times with no disturbance. Due to lack of personnel, we were unable to conduct a count of Steller sea lions during this survey.

## **Harbor seal disturbance**

We encountered a total of 31 harbor seals hauled out our study sites in 2024, of which 7 adults and one pup flushed into the water at approximately 370 meters at Geikie on 8/6/24. During this interaction our vessel approached slowly and steadily in a manner that did not appear to cause panic or stampede as per the conditions of our LOA. Twenty-three seals at Lone were not visibly disturbed at distances greater than 500 meters on 8/6/24 and no survey was conducted to avoid disturbance of the seals.

## **Marked or tagged marine mammals**

We did not observe branded Steller's sea lion at South Marble Island in 2024.

## **Offshore predators**

We did not observe killer whales in the vicinity of our study sites in 2024.

**Table 1. Location, date and observations of surveys and marine mammals observed during gull and climate monitoring in Glacier Bay, January 1 – December 31, 2024. Distance indicates the minimum approach distance to the marine mammals. All surveys were conducted on clear days when there was no fog or rain obstructing visibility, so the horizontal visibility on the water was estimated to be 4.5 km. SMI = South Marble Island, HASE = harbor seal, SSL = Steller sea lion, HO = hauled out.**

Location	Date	Time	Tide	Weather/ Horizontal Vis.	Species	Number of Adults	Number of Pups	Original behavior	Level 3 Flushed	Level 2 Move	Level 1 Alert	Approximate Distance (m)	Survey Type	Mitigation
Geikie	6/14/24	1030	Flood	Clear/ 4.5km	HASE	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	Gull ground	-
Geikie	8/6/24	1405	High	Clear/ 4.5km	HASE	7	1	HO	8	-	-	370	Gull vessel	Slow approach
Lone	4/18/24	930	High	Clear/ 4.5km	HASE	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	Climate	-
Lone	8/6/24	1446	High	Clear/ 4.5km	HASE	23	0	HO	0	0	0	> 500 m	Gull vessel	did not survey, did not disturb
SMI	8/7/24	1639	High	Clear/ 4.5km	SSL	-	-	HO	0	0	0	> 100 m	Gull vessel	stayed >100 m, did not count or disturb
				<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>HASE</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>			